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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6120  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0318  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3871  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7413  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4965  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3146  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0787  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000526

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STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA;

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC READY TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON BURMA

REF: RANGOON 0100

Classified By: Econoff TLManlowe for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Frustrated by lack of progress in resolving the GOB's restrictions on International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) humanitarian activities in Burma, ICRC has given the Minister of Home Affairs and other GOB officials an ultimatum: if regime leaders will not agree to meet ICRC President Kellenberger this month to discuss ICRC's mandate, ICRC will send a letter to selected Asian-Pacific nations, requesting their diplomatic intervention with regime leaders to allow the resumption of prison visits and other mandated activities in Burma. If that proves fruitless, ICRC plans to close its remaining branch offices and go public with its frustrations. The GOB responded vaguely in Geneva this week, offering the ICRC President a meeting with "concerned authorities." ICRC management must now decide whether to send the letter or try to extract more specifics from the GOB first. End summary.

¶2. (C) On June 1, Pierre Andre Conod, Head of ICRC Delegation in Burma, briefed Charge a.i. on his organization's recent attempts to prompt the GOB to allow ICRC to resume its activities and fulfill its mandate to deliver humanitarian services. These actions follow the plan that Conod initially described earlier in the year for ICRC to be more outspoken about the regime's restrictions on the ICRC (reftel). Publicizing the closure of two offices brought no GOB results, he said. Since then, Conod met in Nay Pyi Taw with the Deputy Foreign Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Police Chief. He told them last week that the ICRC believed that the GOB had made political decisions to curtail ICRC's humanitarian activities and not engage in a dialogue. The GOB had not responded at all to the ICRC President's request to visit Burma to review the situation, made in January 2007. Conod said he told GOB ministers that the GOB does not seem to take ICRC and its humanitarian concerns seriously.

¶3. (C) ICRC strategy is to elevate the public pressure on the regime by acting through other nations in the region, first with a "semi-public" campaign: ICRC has drafted a letter to nine Asian-Pacific governments that will ask them to intervene diplomatically to encourage the GOB to accept a

high level meeting to discuss ICRC's mandate and allow a resumption of its humanitarian activities in Burma, including prison visits. ICRC chose the countries (including Japan, China, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Republic of Korea) because they have better access to GOB officials, Conod said, and because ICRC does not want the new initiative to be perceived as a Western-backed effort.

¶4. (C) According to Conod, if those diplomatic efforts do not succeed, ICRC would next consider an openly public campaign using a press conference, press release or newspaper editorials. ICRC would reconsider going public if they receive an indication by the end of June that positive developments are possible. Conod has already briefed the GO on ICRC's intentions and passed a copy of the draft letter to the Deputy Foreign Minister.

¶5. (C) On May 22, Conod said, Police Commander Khin Yi called him to mend fences, and on May 25, Burma's Permanent Representative in Geneva finally responded to the ICRC President's January request, passing a letter that welcomed his visit to Burma but stated that Senior General Than Shwe was "very busy" and offered a meeting with Home Affairs Minister Maung Oo, as well as leaders of the USDA and the Myanmar Red Cross. The ICRC President responded immediately, noting that he, too, was very busy, but offering three dates for an urgent visit at the end of May, in mid-June and in late June and insisting that his meeting should be with top regime leaders. Conod said he told the Home Affairs Minister personally that this issue had now been elevated beyond his level of competence and involved more than one Ministry.

¶6. (C) The GOB replied on May 31 that the ICRC President

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was welcome to visit Burma at the end of June to meet with "concerned authorities." It did not mention the Minister of Home Affairs, and gave no specifics with whom President Kellenberger could meet. ICRC has decided to postpone sending the letter to Asian-Pacific nations while it deliberates how to respond to the invitation. If they can only get a meeting with the acting Prime Minister, ICRC may send a lower level official from Geneva. ICRC believes the meeting to discuss the organization's mandate is vital, Conod said. ICRC would use the meeting to obtain a commitment to a timetable to reestablish all ICRC programs in Burma, including prison visits. Conod said military intelligence officials are opposed to ICRC meetings with prisoners, but the GOB must realize it cannot take ICRC services a la carte.

¶7. (C) With no positive response from the GOB by the end of June, Conod said ICRC will also likely close its office in Taunggyi and possibly in Hpa'an. The GOB "regards ICRC as a human rights organization" at times, he said, but the ICRC's ability to deal with all parties and its humanitarian support are much broader. ICRC's orthopedic support outreach programs will suffer if the offices in Taunggyi and Hpa'an close, where 70% of patients are land mine victims. ICRC plans to maintain support for Myanmar Red Cross orthopedics programs in the region but will end its programs run under the government health system. ICRC also continues to support visits of families to prisoners detained in remote locations. ICRC would like to keep open its Mandalay office, which provides some support for orthopedics programs and helps the large number of prisoners' families who live in that region, but will review its status based on events this month. ICRC has no intention of closing down its Rangoon office, Conod stressed. He also briefed the UK, Germany and other major donors about the new strategy but is not requesting any action at this time.

¶8. (C) Comment: Frustrated with the regime's constant stalling, the ICRC hopes Burma's neighbors can apply greater pressure on a regime that successfully ignored the fall-out of its decision to close its Moulmein and Kyengtung offices and resulting international criticism. Conod noted that ICRC

cooperation with China had increased this year. Stringing discussions along with minimal progress is a favorite regime tactic, but the ICRC is trying to stick to firm deadlines to overcome official obstinacy and reach the only people able to make a real commitment. End comment.

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